

## Neighbourhood Expansion and Urban Livability in Seremban Municipality Area, Malaysia

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### Abstract

*The approach taken in this article is looks at change influencing the understanding of the phenomenon. A pattern of change that seems smooth and linear at a smaller scale might yield fluctuations that can only be perceived at a larger scale, closer to ground zero. Viewing change at the local level can provide tipping points and critical transitions that are hidden in the more general pattern and such detailed incremental approach to urbanization allows one to understand why, given the same set of drivers, some areas seem to prosper while others lag far behind. This provides an alternative viewpoint to the traditional market oriented aggregate analysis or the hedonistic explanation to growth. This article views urban expansion as a culmination of local level activities that emerge into a complex network of urban growth. This urban expansion in Malaysia can be traced back as early as the 1890, and the transition issues in Malaysian urbanization include the phases of the urbanization experience, the rise of mega urban regions, and the need for a new way of viewing the processes through the daily decision makings carried out by individuals in the city. These decisions eventually produce the spatial-temporal patterns of life in the Malaysian cities. These are then visualized in the patterns of land use, housing spread, commercial use and others. The patterns are dynamic, often time changing in response to changing drivers. The article argues that effective planning for the urban expansion needs to be viewed from the local scene. The various local scenarios are then built up incrementally over space and time to produce a regionwide explanation of urbanization. This is, again, an alternate viewing of regional analysis that traditionally looks at the local as merely being a component of the larger region, differentiated by local attributes that create local shifts that skew its share of the regional trend. Housing neighbourhood in the Seremban Municipality area is uses as an illustration of the urban expansion.*

**Keywords:** *Neighbourhood Expansion, Urban Livability, Malaysia*

### Abstrak

Pendekatan yang diambil di dalam artikel ini adalah untuk melihat sesuatu perubahan yang mempengaruhi pemahaman sesuatu fenomena. Corak perubahan dilihat sebagai berterusan dan lurus pada skala yang kecil mungkin berlaku perubahan yang besar jika dilihat dari skala yang lebih besar, yang menghampiri keadaan sebenar. Meneliti perubahan pada skala lokal akan menyediakan titik lonjakan dan peralihan kritikal yang tersembunyi dalam corak yang lebih umum dan pendekatan lebih mendalam dalam peningkatan pendekatan terhadap perbandaran mengizinkan untuk memahami mengapa sesebuah kawasan adalah lebih baik berbanding dengan kawasan yang ketinggalan walaupun pemacu yang digunakan adalah sama. Artikel ini melihat perluasan kawasan perbandaran yang terjadi adalah hasilan aktiviti peringkat lokal yang muncul dalam jaringan kompleks pertumbuhan bandar. Perluasan kawasan perbandaran di Malaysia boleh dijejak semula seawal tahun 1890an dan isu-isu peralihan dalam perbandaran di Malaysia termasuklah pengalaman perbandaran, kemunculan kawasan perbandaran mega, dan keperluan baru cara untuk melihat proses melalui pembuatan keputusan harian yang dilakukan oleh individu setiap hari. Keputusan ini menghasilkan corak ruang-masa kehidupan masyarakat bandar di Malaysia. Keadaan ini divisualisasikan menerusi corak guna tanah, perluasan kawasan perumahan, komersil dan lain-lainnya. Coraknya berubah-ubah seiring dengan tindakbalas pemacu yang juga berubah-ubah. Artikel ini menghujahkan bahawa perancangan yang berkesan untuk perluasan kawasan perbandaran perlu dilihat dari pandangan lokal. Kepelbagaian senario lokal kemudiannya terbina secara berperingkat dalam tempoh ruang dan masa untuk menghasilkan penjelasan perbandaran pada skala wilayah. Kawasan perumahan di kawasan Majlis Perbandaran Seremban (MPS) digunakan sebagai ilustrasi perluasan kawasan perbandaran.

**Katakunci:** *Perluasan kejuranan, dayahuni bandar, Malaysia*

## INTRODUCTION

Malaysia has experienced rapid neighborhood expansion especially since 1970s in urban areas due to the rapid urbanization process. More than two thirds of the people now live in urban areas, and the number is expected to increase further in the year 2020. A major portion of urban land area is assigned for housing development, converted from agriculture and forest land. Changing demographics, foreign direct investment, the availability of human capital, land availability and suitability; and the availability of current technology are the major driving forces for escalating housing demand and construction. Nevertheless, the construction of housing estates has resulted in positive and negative impacts especially on the physical environment and social well-being. This article discusses on neighborhood expansion in the Seremban Municipality Area, in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia for the past two hundreds years. The expansion of housing schemes especially as from the 1970s, when the New Economic Policy (NEP) which was launched to stimulate economic vibrancy, and to increase social well-being, became an important watershed for urban development in Malaysia. The key argument here is how livable the current housing estates are and how are they related to the neighborhood expansion in the multi-ethnic society of Malaysia. The Malaysian society comprises the Malays, Chinese, Indians and others who have their own values and preferences, and above all differing affordabilities that will be the major challenge in Malaysian housing expansion. The article presents some findings on the socio-spatial dimension, structures and patterns of housing expansion and urban livability as well as vulnerability in Seremban Municipal areas.

“Sometime in 2008, the world will cross an invisible but momentous milestone: the point at which more than half the people on the planet - roughly 3.2 billion human beings - live in cities’ (State of the World 2007). About 50 million people are moving to the cities and suburbs each year. More than at any time in history, the future of humanity, our economy and the planet that supports us will be determined in the world cities. These facts were also stressed by Mc Gee (2009) when he said that statistically for the first time in global history the world had the majority of its population living in urban places. The issue is how livable are the cities.

The crux of livability can be argued to be centred around the home, where everyday life activities revolve. While people can shift workplaces and shop almost anywhere, the decision to stay and make a home is a significant signal for the livability of a place. Established housing areas represent stable places for generations, made possible through the

neighborhoods high livability. New housing areas have yet to prove themselves, some will become transit hubs for impermanent workers, with ever changing tenants, while others will attract families to turn the housing areas into homes or ‘*kampung halaman*,’ the Malay term for a village which families and individuals identify with. The research on Seremban’s housing is part of the effort to understand local livability and sustainability. Specifically, what makes the residents choose one housing location instead of another, and how has the spatial housing pattern evolves over the years. The assumption, of course, is that areas with a large percentage of well kept, established (long lasting) housing areas are the most livable, while areas with a large percentage of run-down houses are considered less livable. The study would then zero in on representative housing areas to determine the probable causes for these. However, the first step is to overview the general pattern of housing distribution in Seremban with data gleaned from as early as two hundred years ago. The paper presents the historical and political economic contexts of housing growth in Seremban and the overarching residential spatial patterns. The housing development scheme in the Seremban Municipality is divided into three phases based on the Malaysian urbanisation experiences - The Nascent; Pseudo-Urbanization; and the rise of the Mega Urban Regions that have been articulated in earlier article on Malaysian Urbanization Transition (Abdul Samad Hadi et al in this issue).

Records have it that nucleated settlements had appeared in the territory that forms the area of Malaysia today for more than one thousand years (Lim Heng Kow 1978; Zaharah Mahmud 1970). Some of the larger settlements could have developed non agriculture economic base or some forms of trade, making them urban centres for the largely pre-industrial society. These urban centres could not have formed a system of centres, defined as urban centres that are linked by transport and communication networks because they were isolated from one to another.

**HOUSING TRANSFORMATION AND URBAN LIVABILITY**

Figure 1 below sets the driving forces of housing expansion in an urban metabolism framework. The framework begins with the initial control, the housing landscape embedding the physical and socio-economic infrastructure. These infrastructures in turn allow production, consumption and linkages of all kinds in the housing development. The outcome will be either promoting livability to the city in which the urbanites enjoy a fullsome and vibrant, housing environment, or vulnerable housing circumstances. In the framework, when the outcome of the process is livable, the feedback to the total system should lead to sustainable maintenance with empowerment; while vulnerable outcomes feedback loop will stress on many ameliorative actions. The final expected outcome of the process in the framework will be sustainable housing areas in a livable city.

**METHODS**

The spatial aspect of the urban metabolism allows for the observation of distribution patterns of both the livable and vulnerable aspects of the city area. With time series data, the change in the distribution patterns, the spatial direction of change and the

linkages in the direction of changes can be grasped. Three sets of data are used to analysed the housing dynamics – vulnerability and livability embedded – in the Seremban Municipality area. Housing name, locality and the period of time of the houses built and completed were used to simulate housing growth and expansion. The data were chosen in the absence of other comprehensive data, and together with the water consumption data are be sufficient to capture the housing expansion as well as new houses would have to have it and thus registered with the water authority. The water consumption data provide the ‘livable’ indication of the municipality. Data on crime incidences from the Police Department; and data on the dengue fever from the Department of Health provides some sense of the vulnerable aspect of the municipality.

**HOUSING DEVELOPMENT IN SEREMBAN MUNICIPALITY AREA**

Rapid urban housing development in Malaysia started after Independence in 1957 but recorded faster growth after the 1970s. The series of five years Malaysian Plans (MP) have summarised the increasing number of houses planned and completed by the developers, both government and private sectors. Figure 1 below summarizes the

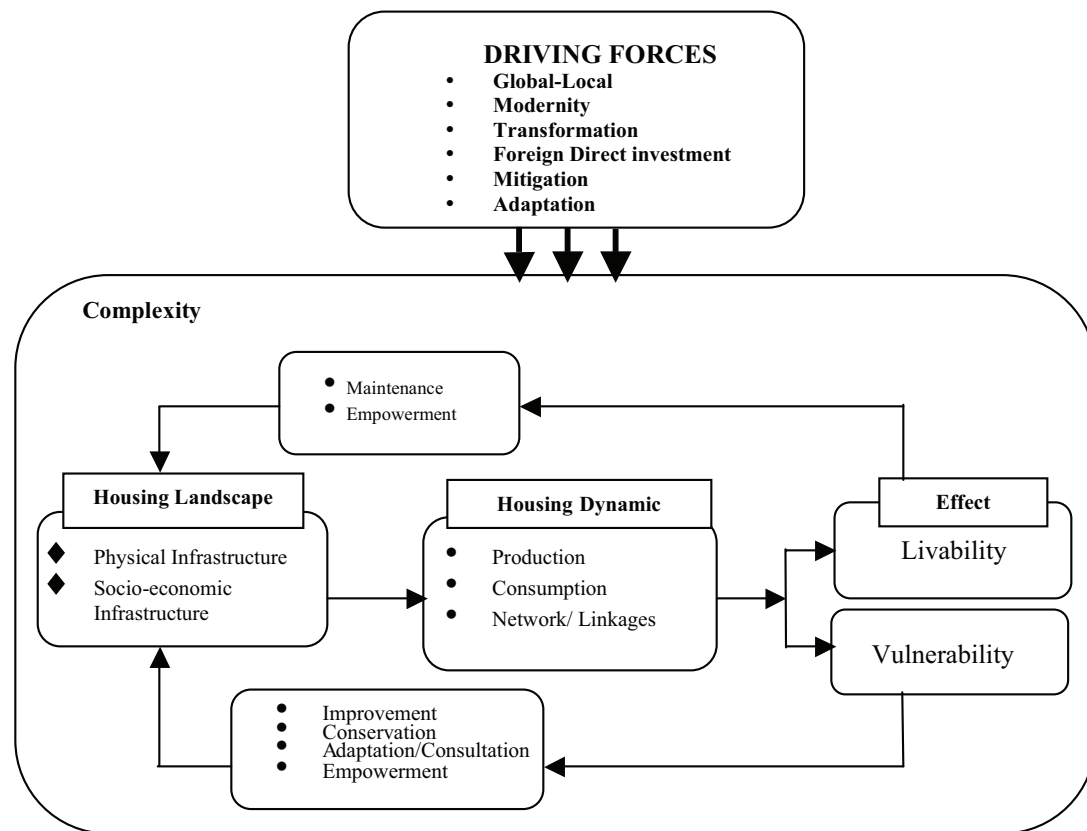


Figure 1: Housing Transformation and Urban Livability

development of housing in Malaysia for the past 50 years. The number of houses completed by the Eight Malaysia Plan Years (1996-2000) had been the highest compared to those completed in other Malaysian Plan periods. In the First Malaysian Plan, the total number of houses completed were the lowest. This was during the immediate years after Independence. Overall, the trend in the number of houses completed has continually increased for the past five decades to fulfilling the demand from the increasing population especially in the urban areas (Malaysia 1971, 1976, 1981, 1986, 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006).

The Seremban Municipality, located in the State of Negeri Sembilan in Peninsula Malaysia, is currently experiencing vibrant economic, social and physical developments. All contribute to the modification of the local urbanites' lifestyle that began from pre-industrial urban Malaysia. Like other state capitals in Malaysia, Seremban has grown out of its 'sleepy hollow' image of yesteryears and the original municipal boundaries have changed to accommodate these developments. The choice of Seremban Municipality is appropriate as it is a mature municipality with a manageable size.

Seremban is an intermediate city with an estimated current population (2008) around 397,000 (Seremban Municipal Council website 2009). The population of Seremban has increased steadily over the last hundred and ten years. In 1891, the total population was less than 3,000 people but increased to 383,530 by the year 2000. The Malays and other local indigenous groups (Bumiputeras) were the majority with 46 percent of the total population followed by the Chinese about 30.6 percent and the Indians 18.5 percent. From the figures the multi-racial nature of the Seremban District and Municipality included is clear. The total population is expected to increase to about 594,000 by the year 2020 (Malaysia 2000).

The Seremban town was founded by the British colonial administration in the closing years of the 19th century and served as the capital of Negeri Sembilan State within the Federated Malay States over the 1895-1947 periods. For over a century Seremban, like any other town with bustling economic activities, grew in area following adjustments to its administrative boundary that took place in the decades after Independence in the year 1957 to accommodate the demand of jurisdiction over the growing urbanized areas taking place on the urban fringes. Seremban is located about 70 kilometers south of the Malaysian conurbation hub, Kuala Lumpur. For decades the municipality has been a commanding southernmost commuting boundary of workers to the Klang Valley.

Placing the recent urban development in Malaysia in the space-time of the Malaysian development initiatives, we have come to witness the varying speeds of those individual urban growth and its subsequent expansion. We will illustrate housing development schemes in the Seremban Municipality areas based on three phases of Malaysian Urban Experiences: Nascent urbanization (1514-1947); pseudo-urbanization (1948-1970); and mega urban regions (1971-present) and beyond.

### **The Nascent Urbanization (1514 -1824-1947)**

The variance in the speed of change can be traced back from as early as the founding of the city. For most Malaysian major cities, their beginnings were linked to the British colonial government administration in the Straits Settlements, the Federated Malay States and much later to the Federation of Malaya, the Brooks family in Sarawak and the East India Company earlier in Sabah (Lim Heng Kow 1978; Abdul Samad Hadi & Sulong Mohamad, 1990). Cities were founded to administer law and order that in turn allowed for the prospering of British investment (foreign and local owned) in tin exploitation and rubber growing in both estates. The administrative functions were instrumental in influencing the arrangement of the internal urban structure; colonial complex - comprising, for example, the Resident's house and British officials' housing area, the administrative center, the court house, churches and green areas. All were built in close proximity to each other for ease of mobility and also for security. The police headquarters were close by to oversee social order and the general safety of the city.

Over the 1895-1948 years housing development was confined within areas close to the town centre (Figure 2) because of land availability and the need to be close to the city centre following limited transportation modes; basic goods for households were circulable in the town centre. Moreover, compact land use in the urban centre made it easier to police.

### **The Pseudo-Urbanization (1948-1970)**

Housing development during The Independence Era was still mostly confined to the town centre which housed all economic activities such as retailing, whole selling, legal services and health clinics. Shop houses were mainly two storeys. The first level of building was usually the place where the business was done, while level two where the family lives. Malaysian urbanists have reported that these early urban settlements largely offered goods and services in sundry shops mode in the early times with little specialization in addition to their earlier functions of providing security, law and order for the urbanites as well as the people in the rural hinterland (Hamzah Sendut 1962, 1965; Jackson 1974). The drivers of the

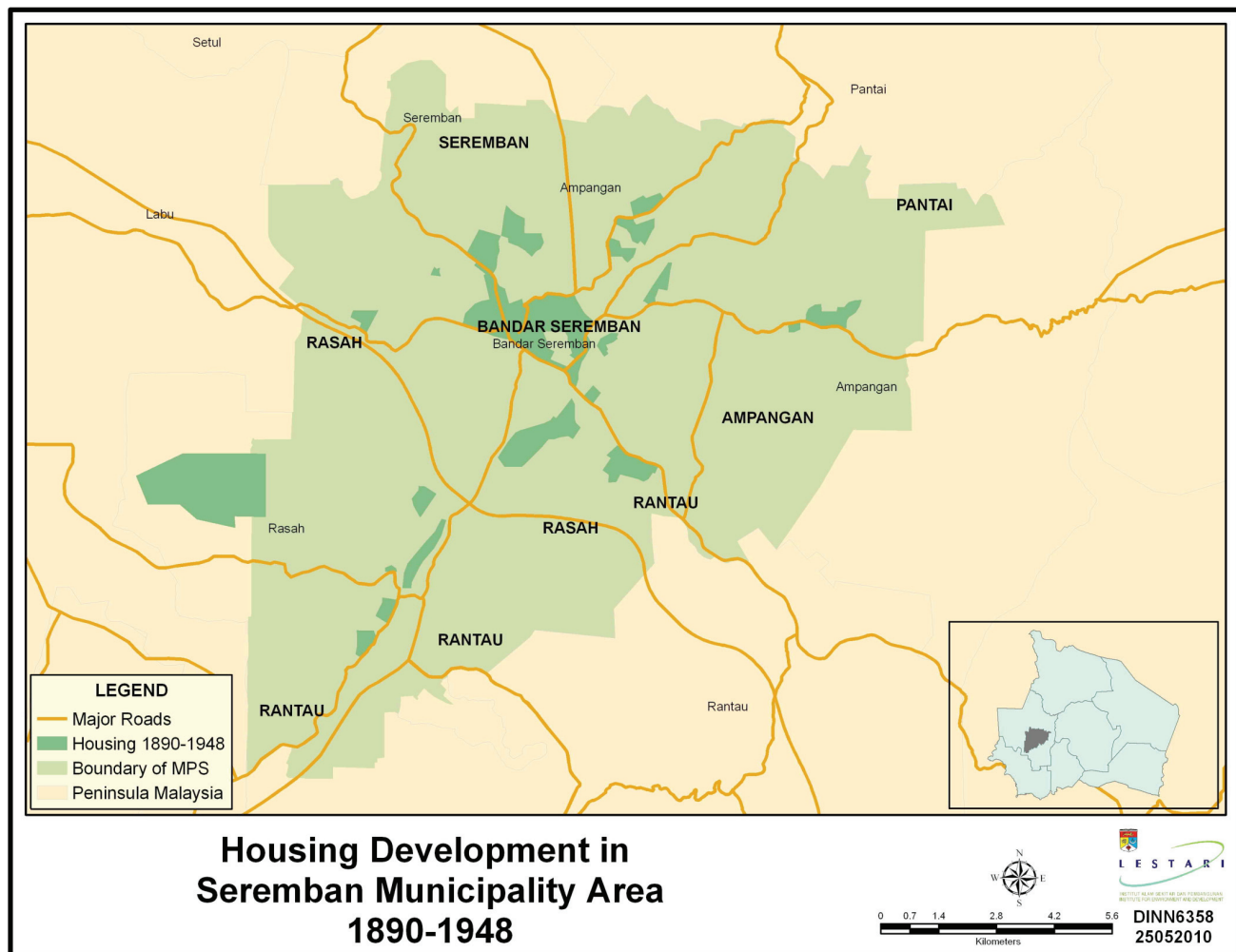


Figure 2: Housing Distribution During The Nascent Urbanisation Phase in The Seremban Municipality Area

urban development and expansion at the time came basically from resource exploitation and rubber growing in the hinterland. The driving forces made the compact urban housing areas close to the town centre sustainable.

#### The Rise of the Mega Urban Regions (1971 – Beyond)

The New Economic Policy (NEP) was introduced in 1970 aimed basically at eradicating poverty among all races and to restructure the Malaysian society such that not any one group would in the end be identified with any economic label (Malaysia 1971). Numerous strategies, programmes and activities were undertaken to meet the broad socio-economic goals and targets. The impacts of the policy on the urban areas were far reaching. The original time frame for the implementation of the new economic policy was between the 1970 until 1990. Parallel to that, housing development in the Seremban Municipality area was

seen as one of the implementational instruments of the policy. In the early 1970s not many housing schemes were developed but the late 1970s and early 1980s were the inflection points in the housing properties' market that boosted the economic growth in Seremban.

Since 1980 about 42,900 houses have been built. In 1991 about 69,700 units of houses were built, and about 114,000 units were built in 2000, and resulted in about 63.6% increase for 20 years. In terms of living unit distribution, about 96,205 units were located in urban areas while 17,763 units were built in the rural areas by the year 2000 (Malaya 1956, 1961; Malaysia 1971, 1976, 1981, 1986, 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006). The ethnic composition in the study area was as follows, Bumiputera (Malay) 183,749, Chinese 119,768, Indian 73,059, Others 2,182 and non-Malaysian 18,427 in the year 2000 (Seremban Structure Plan). About 30% of the houses are specifically allocated for Bumiputeras to enable them to own urban houses.

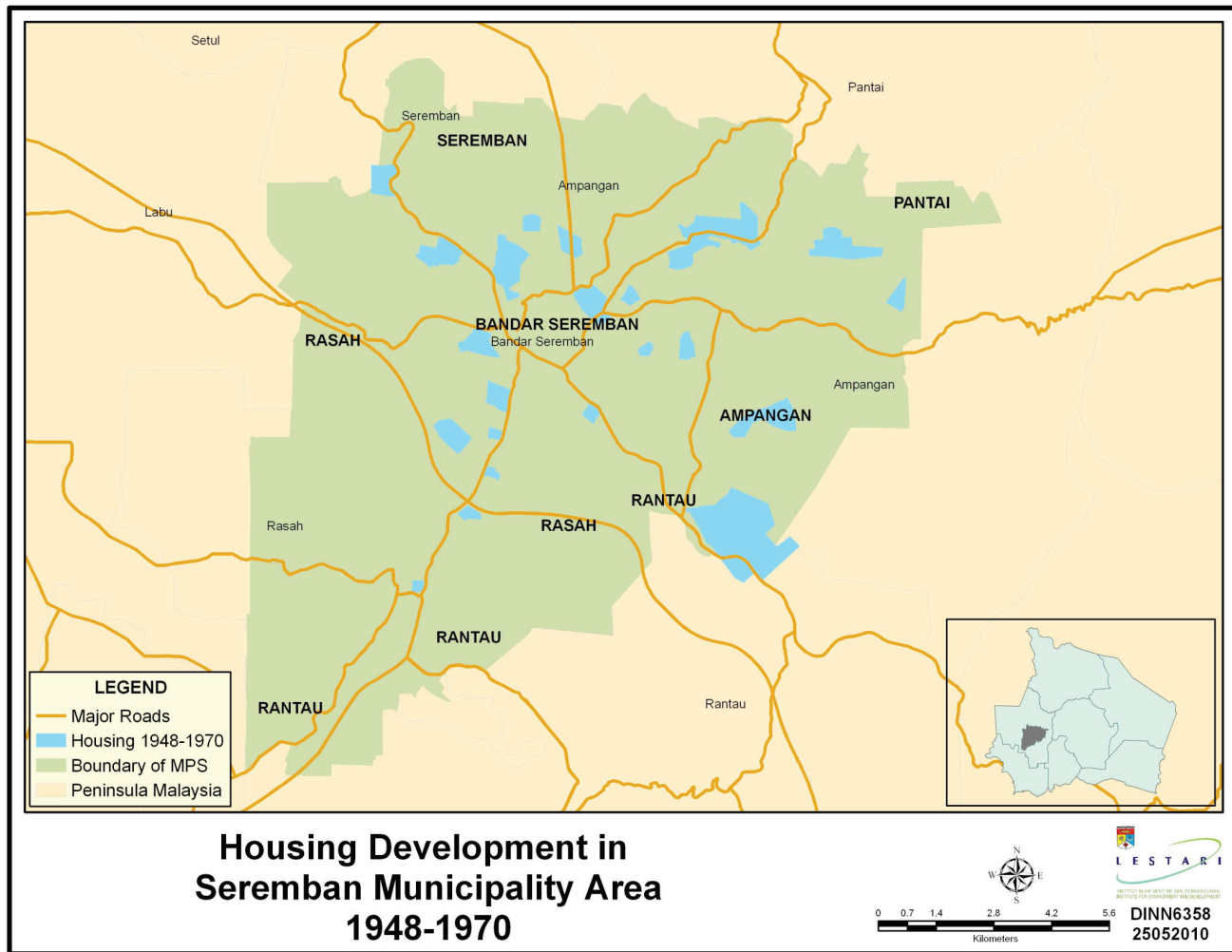


Figure 3: Housing Distribution During The Pseudo-urbanisation Phase in The Seremban Municipality Area

In short, in this phase of urbanisation experiences, all the drivers of development set in Figure 1 were made to function. All the drivers could easily be grouped into the role of the state – development policies on housing of the Federal and the Negeri State governments, guidelines on housing and new neighbourhood of the Seremban Municipality and the Federal Planning Department; the market situation – availability of fund to developers and so on; and the community – the ability to buy house, accessibility to mortgage and so on.

From information gathered by the planning section of the municipality, we can assert that the Seremban municipality has been growing outwards from the commercial centre to the periphery in a complex manner. Until the 1970s the outward growth had been slow since much of the economic activities in the municipality were medium level retailing and support services despite the availability of good physical and social infrastructures. Some residents commuted to Kuala Lumpur, about 80 kilometers for high end shopping and efficient public transport

helped commuters. However since the 1970s the municipality has attracted people to come and stay with the opening of the State to foreign direct investments in line with the opening of Malaysia to international investments. With the establishment of footloose branch companies by international industries from the West, and later from Taiwan and South Korea, the municipality began to expand faster outward. With the establishment of industrial areas in the 1970s, hyper-markets, more support services and recreational facilities moved in along with new housing estates to cater for new expanding demands. New housing neighborhoods sprang up in all directions outward to the rural periphery. Expanding with it are new state of the art infrastructures.

Figure 4 shows the expansion of housing development outward of the city centre during this phase. The expansions to the east (Ampangan dan Pantai) area are limited by the hills towards Kuala Pilah. Meanwhile the housing area to the north were also extended, yet limited by the Gala Forest Reserved area. Further expansion is expected to be to

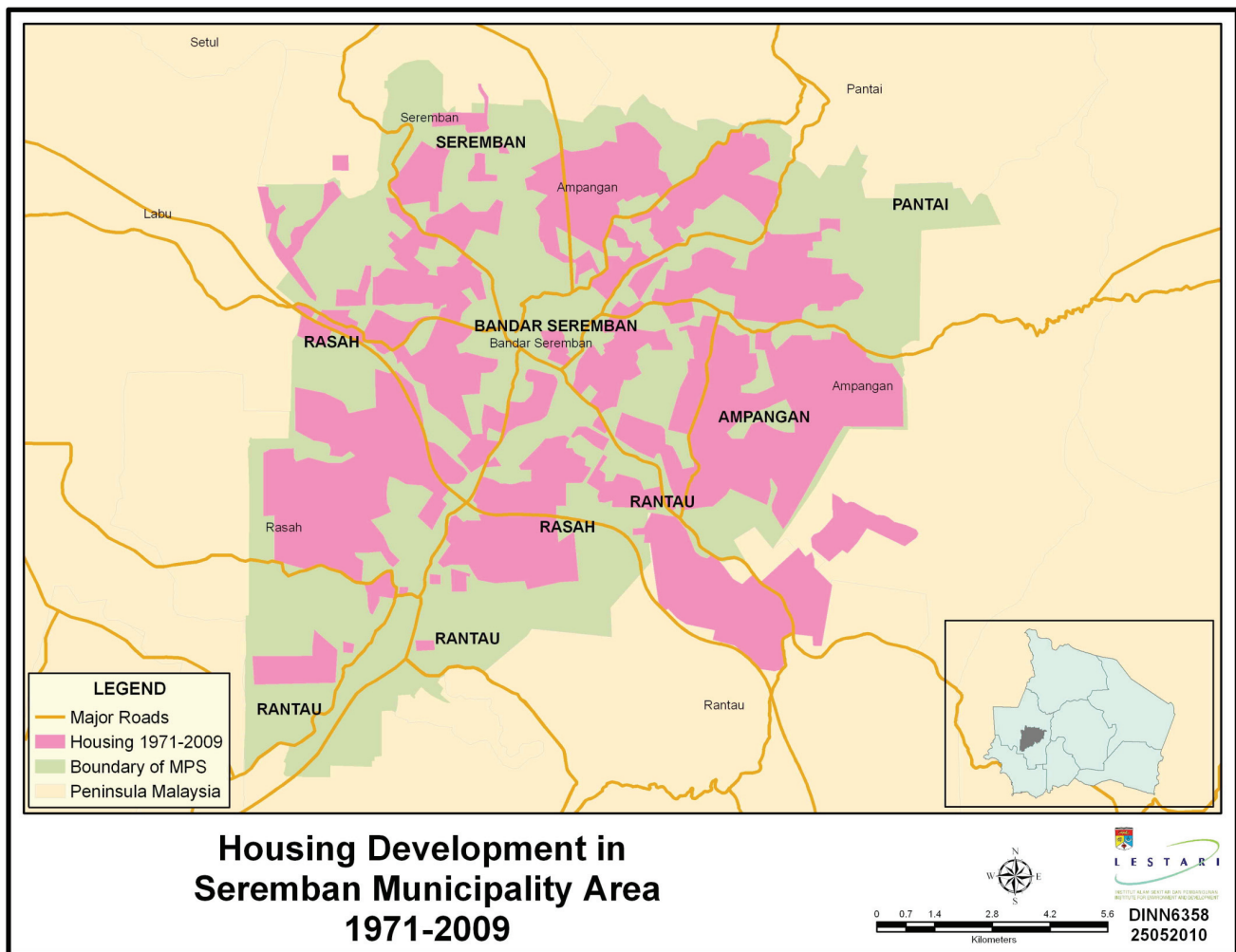


Figure 4: Housing Distribution During The Mega Urban Region Phase in The Seremban Municipality Area

the south around the Rantau area due to its flat and lowland area characteristics. Accessibility, especially roads, is a major force for the housing expansion.

Figure 5 shows the overall expansion of housing areas within a range of 15 km buffer in the Seremban Municipality area in almost two hundreds years. The account of housing development and expansion in Seremban indicated that new houses in the Seremban Municipality were built in new housing neighbourhoods, new housing estates and new towns associated with industrial areas. New economic opportunities created under the umbrella of the New Economic Policy (1970-1990) and the decades beyond (1990- current year) had brought about multiple overlapping inputs towards social, infrastructural development and spatial development in the Seremban Municipality. The manufacturing industries in new industrial areas of the municipality attracted people to come to work in the municipality. Housing needs of the growing number of people

in the municipality were slowly met when the state government developed the public and private partnership in which private housing developers, financial institutions and the public authority offered consumers affordable housing for all. The poorer households were offered low cost houses or even specially low price flats for them as shown in the Paroi area.

#### HOUSING TRANSFORMATION AND VULNERABILITY

The spatial analysis of the dengue related health cases shows the distribution of the dengue cases for the years in 1996 until 2007 focusing on the Ampangan sub-district area. The number of dengue cases increased yearly with the highest cases recorded in the Taman Paroi Jaya with 226 cases followed by Taman Seremban Jaya with 218 cases (Figure 6). Both areas are located in the middle class area and the dengue cases were easily linked to the activities of planting

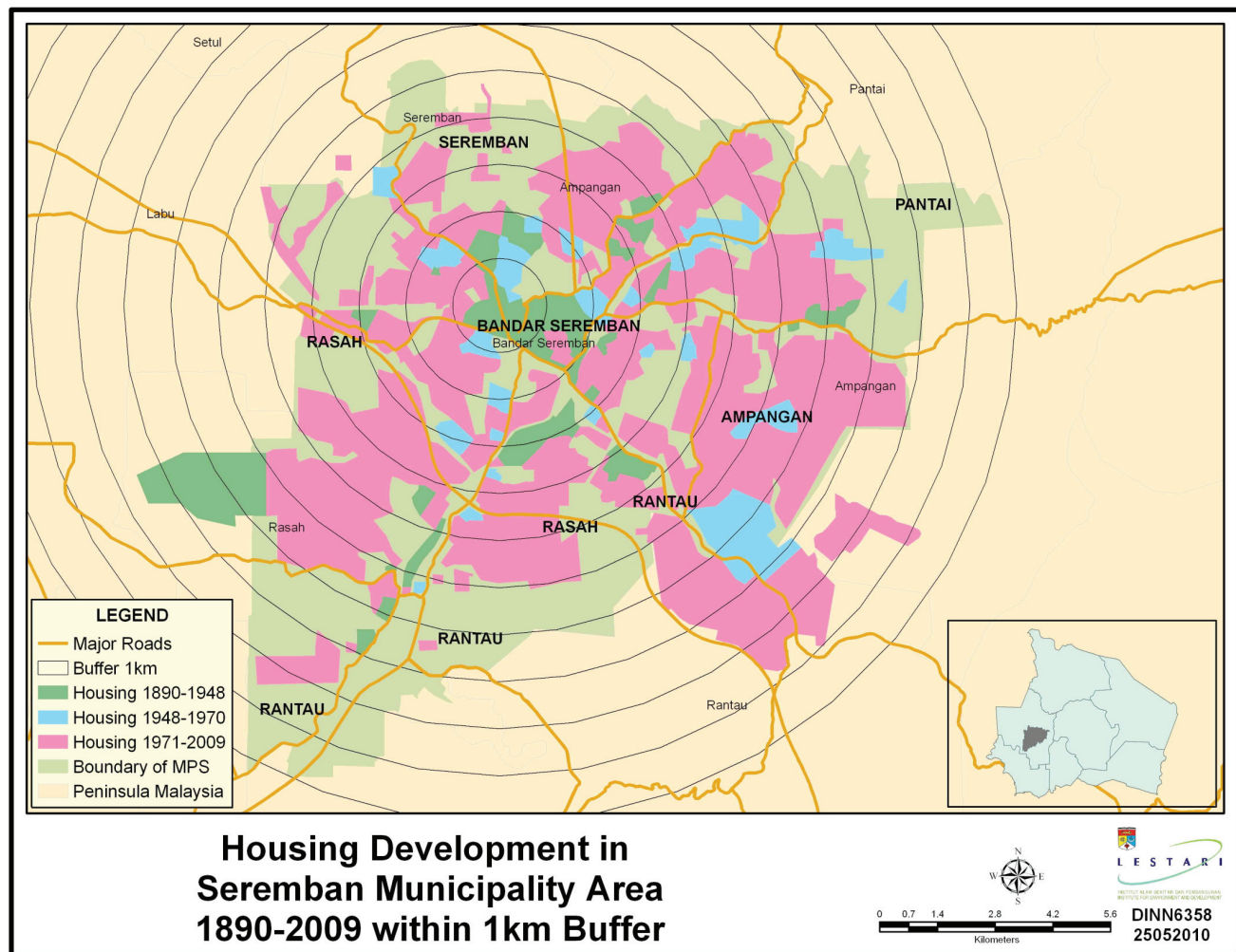


Figure 5: Housing Distribution within 1km Buffer

ornamental plants in their spacious garden; often fresh water got collected for mosquitoes breeding ponds at the base of the containers.

Based on the spatial analysis, the dengue cases were clustered into six areas, namely Taman Ampangan, Taman Paroi Jaya, Taman Seremban Jaya, Taman Senawang Jaya, Taman Rasah Jaya and Taman Satria. These places had recorded more than 100 dengue cases for the past 10 years.

Turning now to crime incidences in the municipality, crime cases identified were mainly related to robbery, robbery with arm, theft and murder. The distribution pattern of crime occurrences was dispersed but took place mainly in the city centre mostly in the high densities shopping areas and housing areas. Taman Seremban Jaya recorded 426 cases, Taman Rasah Jaya recorded 204 cases, Terminal One recorded 145 cases and others Jalan Dato' Bandar Tunggal, Taman Tasik Jaya and Jalan Tunku Munawir recorded 142, 137 and 134 cases respectively. Other areas showing the crime cases were less than 120 cases for the past 10 years, (Figure 7).

The crime cases recorded show people living in the urban areas were more vulnerable and the security, infrastructure such as police officers and private security guards have to work closely with the residents of the areas.

## CONCLUSION

There is still much to write about how housing neighbourhoods are formed and evolve, how we might best understand and then simulate them, and most importantly, how we should design plans which enable them to function in more efficient and sustainable ways. Housing expansion is a major phenomenon of urbanization in Seremban. The pattern shows an outwardly movement over the years with infilling occurring in between during the different urbanization phases. Rapid housing expansion and growth coincides with economic growth and changing government policies. Yet some specific areas were favoured for housing development, rather than others. Therefore any goals that we might have for the future city are contingent on the present, hence continually subject to revision and



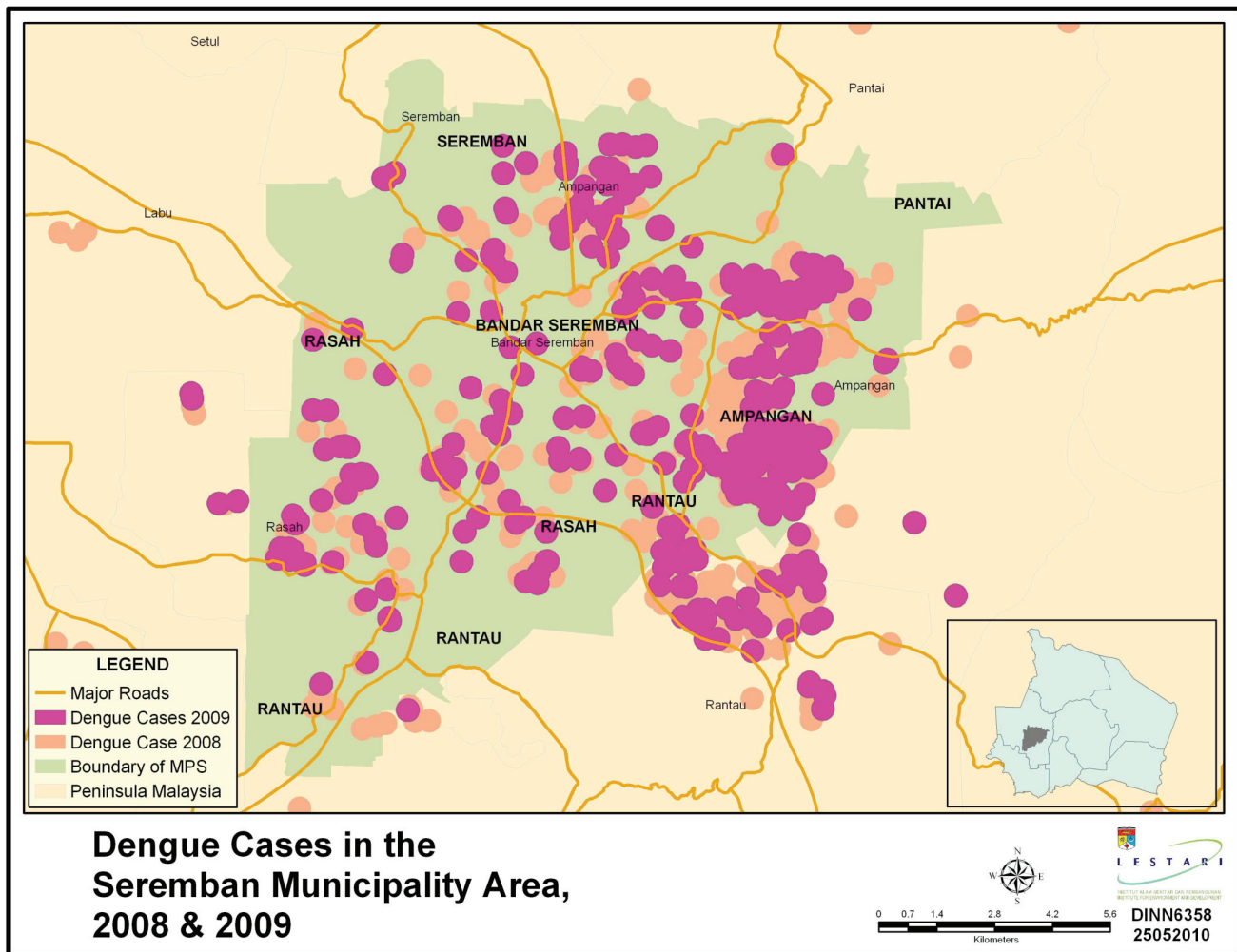


Figure 6: Dengue Cases in the Seremban Municipality Area 2008 & 2009  
 Source: Data analysed by the author. Original data from Department of Health, Seremban, 2008

compromise. In the past, housing had been designed in a timeless future where sets of objectives had been defined to be achievable as if the city were cast in timeless web, and it is of little surprise that few cities have ever achieved the aspirations set out in their plans. Complexity theory brings up the problem of the unknowable future and the way housing evolves from the bottom up, incrementally as the products of decisions that might be optimal at any one time but always subject to changing circumstances at another. While the number of housing stock has increased, the newer houses in the new housing areas maybe inaccessible to some sections of the population due to inappropriate pricing incommensurate with the mean income level. The research is expected to analyse the income level of the people, housing needs, the available stock and hence prices to make better sense of the patterns in the end.

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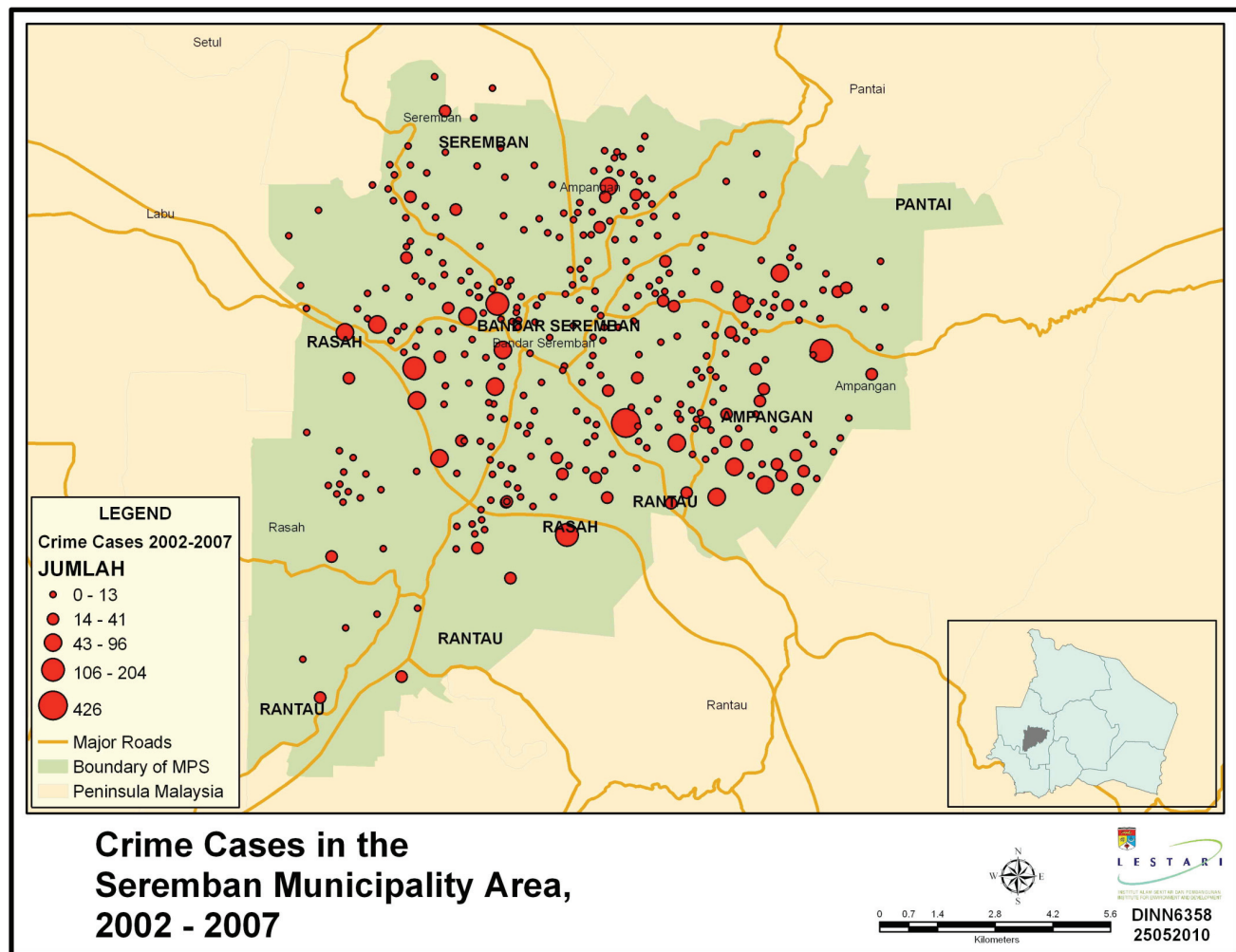


Figure 7: Crime cases in Seremban Municipality Area, 2002 – 2007  
 Source: Data analysed by the author. Original source from Seremban Police Department, 2008

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